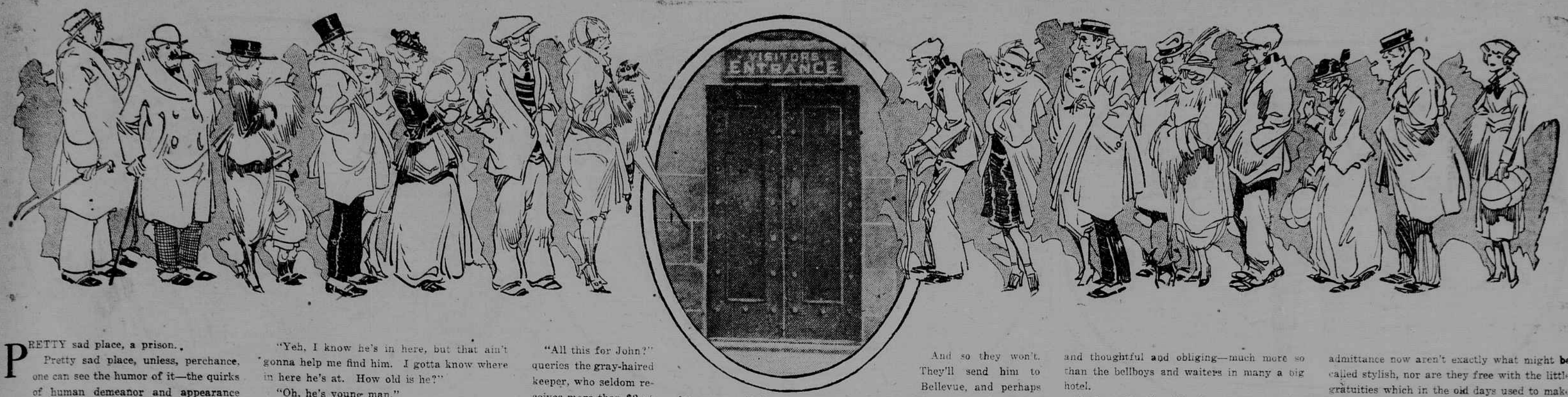
WHERE DAME JUSTICE RECEIVES HER CALLERS

By DWIGHT S. PERRIN

Drawings by JEFFERSON MACHAMER



Not especially hospitable is the visitors' entrance to the Tombs

PRETTY sad place, a prison.

Pretty sad place, unless, perchance, one can see the humor of it—the quirks of human demeanor and appearance that make people act strangely or appear odd under strained circumstances.

Take the visitors' gate at the Tombs, a niche in the grim, gray wall on the Franklin Street side. Not a place where one would exactly expect to be doubled up by laughter, but funny enough if one pokes around behind the tears and the heartaches and the despair that men, women and children bring to it—and most often take away again.

Enter a timid young foreigner. He wants to see Joe Birbiglio. That isn't his name, but it will do for the purposes of this tale.

"What tier is he on?" demands the keeper, seated before a grill on which are posted the names of the longer term prisoners, for all the world like the index upon which the hotel room clerk keeps track of arriving and departing guests, removing a name slip here, putting in another there.

"Yuh, he's a restaurant keeper," is the visitor's reply, taken bodily, probably, if somewhat out of order, from the antiquated catechism he has been rehearsing all the way downtown in the streetcar.

"But what tier is he on?" insists the guard. "What floor; what floor?"

"What for? Sure. The cop say he got dirt in the restaurant. The judge say he got ten days. He's in here."

"Yeh, I know he's in here, but that ain't gonna help me find him. I gotta know where in here he's at. How old is he?"

"Oh, he's young man."

This is almost too much for the patience of even a super-patient keeper, and he bellows at the trembling visitor:

"How old is he? Is he fifteen or is he sixty?"

"Yuh, fifteen sixty. Young fellow."

Finally, by an industrious search of every register in sight, the keeper finds where Birbiglio is doing his little stretch and sends his friend off to talk to him through the little square screen which separates those on the outside from those on the in, and everybody is happy, including Joe, who, it turns out, has only one more day to serve.

Around at the other gate, the main entrance to the great prison, there is something of interest, too. Three young women arrive together to leave some money for John, who appears, for the moment at least, to be near and dear to one of them. All are habited in the manner of the flapper—short skirts, silken hose, smart pumps, chic bonnets and short fur coats. Their appearance classifies them as possibly minor show people, perhaps chorus girls.

It does not appear what John is in for. Whatever it is seems to make no difference. One of the girls proffers a $5 bill to the keeper of the book from which all visitors who leave money for prisoners are given a regulation receipt.

"All this for John?" queries the gray-haired keeper, who seldom receives more than $2 at a time by way of such contribution.

"All that for John," echoes the young lady with emphasis.

"Win, place or show?" demands the keeper, experimenting with the vernacular of the racetrack.

"Right on his nose!" flashes back John's fairy godmother, and everybody laughs.

"And" adds the young lady who has been doing all the talking, "I want him out of here by the middle of the week. We're going to be married Sunday."

"O, Romance!" apostrophizes the onlooker as the young women turn away. "O, Romance!"

Next at the money taker's desk is a mother. There is no temptation to joke with her. A dollar is passed over for her Charlie with a note roughly traced in pencil, saying, possibly, that this is all she can spare this week. As she passes on to the package room to leave a bundle of clean underwear for Charlie the air in the dingy old place seems sweeter and cleaner for her having been there.

Then another mother who wants to see the prison doctor. Their conversation is inaudible, but its drift is obvious. The mother wipes away her tears as she turns to go, and the doctor says:

"Don't you worry. If he gets too sick we won't let him stay here."

And so they won't. They'll send him to Bellevue, and perhaps the next thing his mother will know of it is when a policeman climbs a tenement stairway to tell her that if she wants to see her boy alive she'll have to hurry to the hospital. Maybe the streetcars will be slow, and perhaps the boy will have left all earthly sorrow behind, when, sobbing and out of breath, she passes into the great gate of Bellevue. Over there they have a sleek, fat horse, very much like one that might draw a grocer's cart, which does nothing all day long and half the night but pull from the hospital to the Morgue one after another the men and women who have died. Possibly the mother will be too late to see her boy, except on a cold slab in the squat little building where the dead of the world's greatest city pass in and out, hour by hour, day after day, month in and month out, year upon year.

But as the mother, mayhap with such thoughts in her mind, presents herself at the barred door that leads to the street, another keeper, who really hasn't any call to be sympathetic, gives her a pat on the shoulder and speaks a word of kindness and consolation.

That's an astonishing thing about the Tombs. One might expect the keepers and guards, ever watchful, always stern and unbending, to be exasperated beyond patience at times by the perplexities of their duties. Nothing of the sort. They are amazingly kind and polite and thoughtful and obliging—much more so than the bellboys and waiters in many a big hotel.

Back at the Franklin Street gate another poignant little drama is being enacted. A well dressed young man and woman, husband and wife, arrived with a young boy about eight years old. He is wearing a warm coat, an astrakhan cap and kid gloves. The upper West Side is stamped on him in manner and dress.

"You stand here, Wilson," says his mother, "while daddy and I talk to Uncle Ad. I'm afraid he'll be too busy to talk to you this morning. Be good and we'll be right back."

The child stands obediently at the side of the gate, gazed at and gazing in return at the curiously mixed crowd leaning against the fence at the foot of the wall. For all he knows, apparently, his mother and father are making a business call at a favorite uncle's office. He's just a bit put out that he should be denied the privilege of going in, but tries to understand that there are places where a little boy can't be played with and talked to in business hours.

Respectable, or even moneyed, prisoners seem to be few and far between in the Tombs these days. It has been a long time since Boss Tweed and Roland B. Molineux and Harry Thaw and Albert T. Patrick and their like ordered sumptuous food from the prison caterer and exercised other privileges in a manner calculated to give an air to the old place. As a result the visitors who apply for admittance now aren't exactly what might be called stylish, nor are they free with the little gratuities which in the old days used to make the life of a Tombs keeper profitable, as well as pleasant.

In point of fact, the Tombs hasn't been the same since a newspaper expose a decade ago revealed the fact that prisoners who had money or who could get it were running things pretty much to suit themselves. In those times poker and cocktail parties were popular cell block diversions among a few of the elect. Alderman Davis, John McNamara, held for bank robbery, and a couple of polished wiretappers met in McNamara's cell at 4 o'clock every afternoon, when all the tiers were supposed to be locked and each man in his individual cell, for a quiet game of cards and a few drinks of ready-to-serve cocktails. If the company tired of liquor, there was always black coffee to be prepared on the little electric ranges Davis and McNamara had in their cells, or perhaps a couple of eggs and a bit of ham to be frizzled and served piping hot as an appetizer for the evening meal.

Nowadays the Tombs is, as it should be, very much of a prison. Substantial steel bars and iron-clad regulations have replaced the inner doors that opened two ways for the favored ones and the privileged fripperies which once were theirs. But behind it is something human that isn't too busy or too heartless to pass a pat on the back or a smile or a kind word to the unfortunate kin or friend of the wretches within.

And there is always somebody on duty within the walls of the exaggerated old structure, almost grotesque in its resemblance to a French chateau, who can and will smile with the luckless at the funny things that lie so close to tears.

THE MASTER OF STORMFIELD

THE "private life" of Mark Twain! The expression is in itself a paradox, for such a beloved figure is no longer entitled to a private life. Of him it can be truly said: "He belongs to the public." His birthday is November 30, and each anniversary emphasizes his hold on the popular imagination.

His home life was placid, beautiful, and yet in all its beauty it had a bitter sweetness. Out of this bitterness came some of the most exquisite things he ever wrote. Out of it came his "Joan of Arc."

It was a radiant thing which he gave to his wife—all the generosity and sweetness of his spirit. He poured into his home life all that he poured into his writing—his generosity. He not only met his obligations to his family in full, but more than in full. He was an inspired husband, a glorious father.

The life of Mark Twain is one of the most pathetic of human documents. It was his lot to count the graves of his wife, his little son and his two daughters. One critic in describing the latter part of his career aptly says: "He washed about on a forlorn sea of banquets and speechmaking."

Few of those who knew Mark Twain the man are living to-day. Of his immediate family there remains only one daughter, Mme. Clara Clemens, the well known concert singer, wife of Ossip Gabrilowitsch, world-famous pianist and conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. In New York City lives a niece, Mrs. Edward E. Loomis, who before her marriage bore the same name as his wife, Olivia Langdon.

Katie Leary, who was his housekeeper for twenty-nine years and who has been conducting a rooming house in New York City, is ill in a sanitarium.

John Mead Howells, son of William Dean Howells, the one friend Mark Twain was never too old, too tired or too sad to see, is a noted architect in New York City.

It was John Mead Howells who designed Mark Twain's last home, at Redding, Conn., the place where the famous humorist died. In speaking of the strange circumstance which surrounded the planning and building of Stormfield, Mr. Howells included intimate memories of Mark Twain, which began when, as a five-year-old child, he visited the home of the Clemenses.

"The Clemens girls and my sisters and I were together as babies at Hartford," Mr. Howells recalled. "My father was a year older than Mark Twain, who used to speak of him playfully as 'old Mr. Howells.'

"Mark Twain's career involved a great deal of traveling, but he was never away from his home if he could help it. His whole life centered about his wife, and it was her death which really killed him. She was the loveliest creature you ever saw. He thought her an angel."

Because Mrs. Clemens had been happy in an Italian villa at Florence, shortly before she died, Mark Twain instructed Mr. Howells to make his Redding home a dedication to that memory. To the young architect he said:

"Now, John, I don't want you to copy anything, but I want this house to remind me of the villa we had outside of Florence."

"It was most uncomfortable for me," Mr. Howells said, as he sat in his office. "He wouldn't look at the plans at all, and he wouldn't consult or write a letter about them. 'You build the house; I'll live in it,' he said.

"He told me only that he wanted a billiard room, and that the rooms on the first floor should open into each other, ending with the billiard room. You see, he was very nervous, and liked to walk up and down in his slippers all day, in an unbroken course, from room to room. In every room there was a table with a box of strong cigars on it, and he would reach out into nearly every box during his walk.

"My father never cared anything about smoking, and I remember his asking, 'Clemens, what kind of cigars are those?'

"'I don't know,' Mark Twain answered, 'I get them by the barrel.' Then he added, 'But I never smoke more than one cigar at a time.'

"When he used to stay with us he scared my mother nearly to death because he would go to bed with a cigar in his mouth. She would send my father up to his room when she thought he was asleep to take the cigar away from him."

Mr. Howells regarded through the smoke of his own cigar, and with a tender smile of reminiscence, the paneled picture of Stromfield upon the wall of his office.

"I simply couldn't get Mark Twain to look at the plans of that house," he said. "I recall the day I went down to his home at 21 Fifth Avenue, determined to make him do so. 'Way down the hall, he saw me, and this is the dialogue that took place:

"'That you, John?'

"'Yes.'

"'What's that sticking out under your coat?'

"'The plans.'

"'Well, leave them in the vestibule.'"

Mr. Howells then described the day on which Mark Twain moved into the completed house:

"We pulled up the shades, straightened the rugs, fixed the billiard balls in readiness, and when he went upstairs there were his slippers before the fire."

Mark Twain's homecoming—the arrival of that lonely, bereaved, white haired figure at Stormfield—is already immortalized by his biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine.

"At the entrance his domestic staff waited to greet him," Mr. Paine has chronicled, "and then he stepped across the threshold into the wide hall and stood in his own home for the first time in seventeen years. It was an anxious moment, and no one spoke immediately. But presently his eye had taken in the satisfying harmony of the place and followed on through the wide doors that led to the dining room—on through the open French windows to an enchanting vista of treetops and distant farmside and blue hills. He saiy very gently:

"'How beautiful it all is! I did not think it could be as beautiful as this.'"

Before a year had passed burglars broke into Stormfield.

"Stupid people thought because Mark Twain was famous that he was rich," Mr. Howells explained, "but he cared nothing about money; he despised all that sort of thing. I think he used to wear his sealskin coat, which caused such a sensation in those days, just to tease my father."

Stormfield, which now belongs to Mme. Clara Clemens, is unoccupied to-day, although it has been recently proposed to make it a Mark Twain museum. At the outbreak of the war Mr. Howells drew plans at Mme. Clemens's request to change it into a hospital for wounded soldiers with a musical turn, but this project was abandoned owing to certain restrictions made by the government.

Mark Twain's other homes are literary shrines which draw unending streams of admirers. Even the temporary sheltering places of the humorist in New York City are included in the routes of the sightseeing busses. The old and weather-beaten little house in Florida, Mo., where he was born, draws its crowd of literary worshipers, no matter how inaccessible it is. His later home in Elmira is haunted by enterprising newspaper reporters, eager for a new "angle."

To an outsider the life of Mark Twain was a life of glory and glamour. Those who knew him best, however, would testify that he rarely enjoyed a long period of unbroken happiness. Within the walls of his now historic homes he lost nearly everything he held dear.

The handsome Buffalo home, a gift from his bride's father, later witnessed a long and dangerous illness of his young wife and their baby boy, Langdon. Soon after, in a new home in Hartford, little Langdon died.

Years later, in their permanent Hartford home, his blooming young daughter, Susie, was taken from him. In an Italian villa at Florence there occurred the supreme tragedy of Mark Twain's career, when the beautiful life of Mrs. Clemens drew to an end. Only those who have read the Mark Twain biographies can appreciate what the loss of his wife meant to him. He loved her from the first moment he looked upon her picture—a dainty miniature done on ivory and shown to him by her brother.

As a husband he was whimsically more or less of a Peck's Bad Boy to his wife. She kept him in trim and subdued the wild flares of his personality.

Mark Twain never became resigned to the loss of his wife, and his views on marriage were colored accordingly. Although marriage had brought him his greatest joy in life it had also brought him his greatest bereavement. The following letter shows the tinge of sadness which had crept into his congratulations for an approaching wedding:

"Marriage—yes it is the supreme felicity of life. I concede it. And it is also the supreme tragedy of life. The deeper the love the surer the tragedy. And the more disconsolating when it comes.

"And so I congratulate you. Not perfunctorily, not lukewarmly, but with a fervency and fire that no word in the dictionary is strong enough to convey. And in the same breath and with the same depth and sincerity I grieve for you. Not for both of you and not for the one that shall go first, but for the one that is fated to be left behind. For that one there is no recompense—for that one no recompense is possible.

"There are times—thousands of times—when I can expose the half of my mind and conceal the other half, but in the matter of the tragedy of marriage I feel too deeply for that, and I have to bleed it all out or shut it all in. And so you must consider what I have been through and am passing through and be charitable to me.

"Make the most of the sunshine! And I hope it will last long—ever so long."

Out of the bitterness of his last loss, the death of Jean, he penned in his autobiography some of the most exquisite of his writing, showing a wonderful spirit of resignation. Even Stormfield, which was the home of his last great sorrow, he thought of not in bitterness, but in bravery. This is what he says:

"Why did I build this house two years ago? To shelter this vast emptiness? How foolish I was. But I shall stay in it. The spirits of the dead hallow a house, for me. . . . It is dearer to me to-night than ever it was before. Jean's spirit will make it beautiful for me always." . . .

Life did not sadden Mark Twain. It sweetened him. Bitterness did not destroy him. It was something constructive. It created new powers. It put salt into his tear and a ring into his laughter.